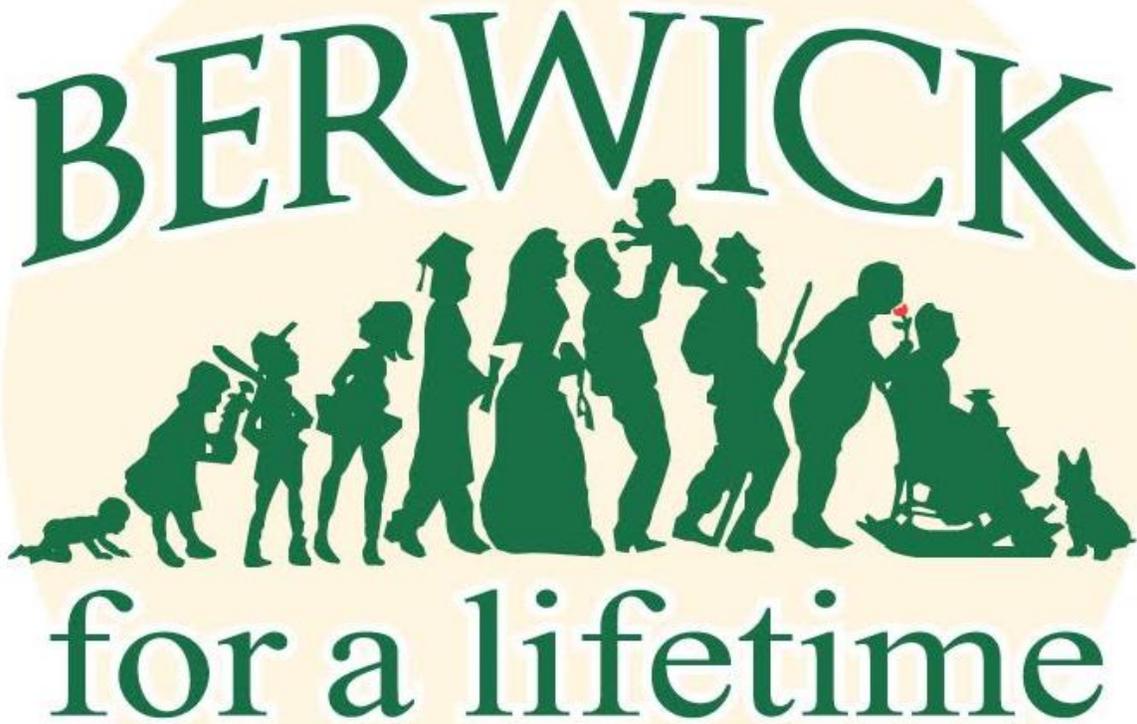


Berwick for a Lifetime



Age-Friendly Action Plan

September 2019



Berwick for a Lifetime Mission:

To assist in making Berwick a better place to live for all ages by improving communications, supporting existing efforts & implementing the Berwick for a Lifetime Action Plan.

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Lori K. Parham, State Director
AARP Maine
53 Baxter Blvd., Suite 202
Portland, ME 04101

Dear Lori,

On behalf of the Town of Berwick; I am pleased to present this age-friendly action plan created by the age-friendly committee, Berwick for a Lifetime, and approved by the Board of Selectmen. This plan sets out the goals and action steps that Berwick for a Lifetime will take for the next three years.

Berwick has an amazing number of volunteer residents that drive this program and numerous others in efforts to improve our thriving community. The central committee within the community is Envision Berwick which has been working on the Prime Tanning Redevelopment Project over the last 7 years. This committee has developed a number of outshoot committees such as Berwick Riverfront, Trail Committee, Great Falls Park Committee and Recreation Master Plan Committee. All of these groups are very active and have a diverse citizen participation. The most exciting aspect of these groups is that the ages of the participants is 20 to 75+ years old.

These projects and more focus on creating places for our older citizens to socialize and mix with younger folks, allowing residents to become more actively engaged in the community, participating in the recreational and social opportunities that they enjoy and thriving in the home of their choice. With the full support of the Board of Selectmen, the AARP Age Friendly Committee looks forward to continuing this work with regional organizations, and with town residents to make Berwick the age friendliest town in Maine!

The Town of Berwick's Age-Friendly Community Plan recognizes the invaluable contribution that our older residents make to the community and provides a forward-thinking approach to enhancing the opportunities and addressing the changing needs of Berwick's residents. It promotes health and well-being and provides opportunities for folks of all ages to maintain social connectedness, engage in local recreational opportunities, and remain active in community life.

The Berwick Select Board embraces the recommendation of the Committee and the plan. We are confident that the plan will enhance and promote the well-being of Berwick's older residents.

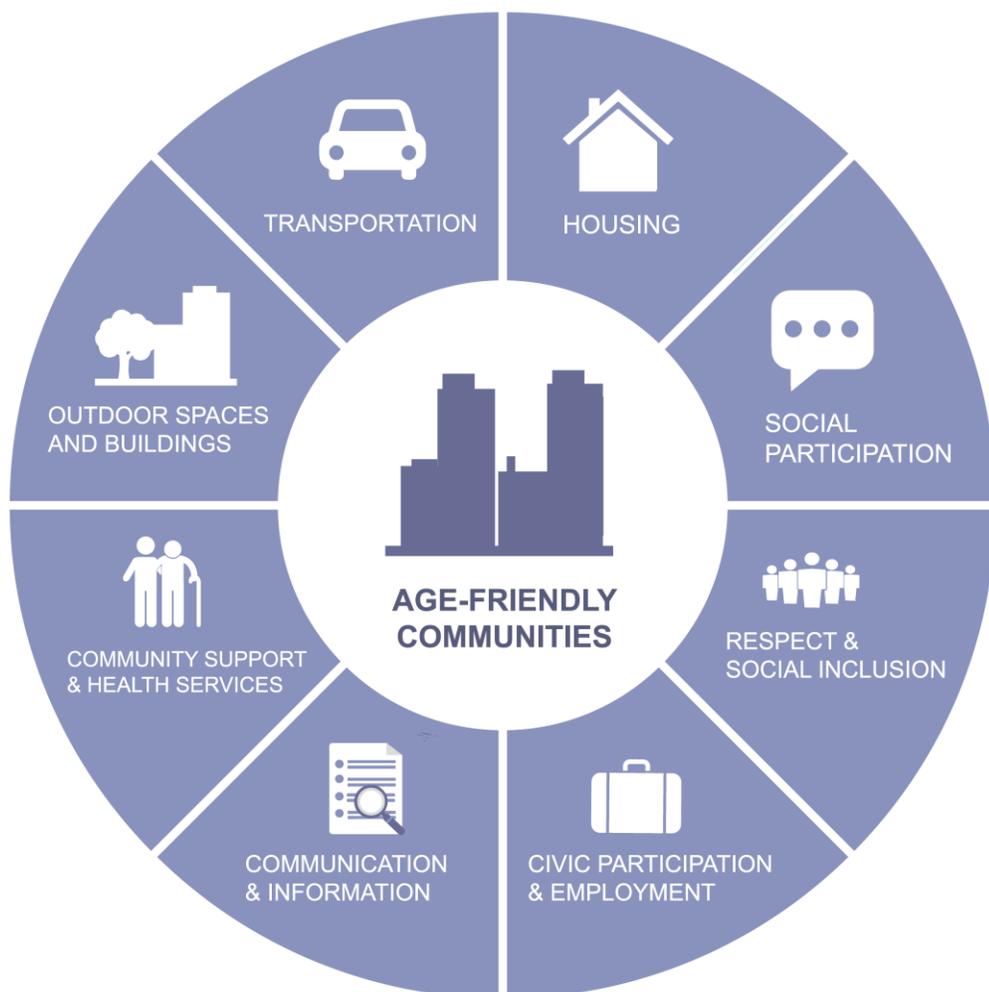
Sincerely,

Stephen Eldridge, MPA

Town Manager

AARP's Strategic Framework – 8 Domains of Livability

AARP has adopted the World Health Organization's 8-Domains of Livability framework which is used by many towns, cities and counties within the AARP Age-Friendly network. The 8-Domains of Livability are Outdoor Spaces & Buildings, Transportation, Housing, Social Participation, Respect & Social Inclusion, Civic Participation & Employment, Communication & Information and Community & Health Services. Berwick for a Lifetime finds all eight domains valuable, however with limited resources and to make the largest impact, our focus is on the following three Domains of Livability: **Transportation, Housing & Communication.**



Transportation



Age-friendly transportation makes it easy for people to get the places they want to go whether they prefer to walk, bike, roll, or drive. Safe streets are good for the economy. When it is easy and convenient to shop locally, retail sales go up. Age-Friendly Maine communities have created safer crosswalks, advocated for bike lanes, increased awareness of local transportation options, and developed volunteer transportation programs.

Housing



Safe and affordable housing conveniently located near amenities promotes health and well-being. Some communities have developed building and zoning codes that encourage lifelong housing or advocated for affordable housing options for different life stages. Voluntary organizations and age-friendly teams have partnered to offer free or no-cost home repair and modification programs.

Communication and Information



Staying connected with activities, resources, and people is key to active, engaged aging. Age-friendly cities and towns in Maine have developed information portals on their town website, designed Facebook pages, or created age-friendly resource manuals that make it easy for people to find information about local activities, services, and programs.

Welcome to Berwick,

Where Tradition Meets Tomorrow

Berwick is a town which possesses a unique opportunity for a “do-over.” In 2008, Prime Tanning closed their doors for good, and now, 11.7-acres is set to be developed into Berwick’s Downtown and Village Center. A dedicated volunteer base has unveiled a shared community vision and has worked together to make the vision a reality. Efforts in Berwick are aimed to create a safe, walkable Village Center which supports businesses and increases recreation and community events for all ages. Berwick for a Lifetime has a wonderful opportunity to reinforce that development Downtown is friendly for all ages. Berwick has a uniquely large volunteer base, including many committees and groups who meet regularly, and an engaged extended community. An ad-hoc Recreation Master Plan committee has created a plan for future recreation opportunities in Berwick. The Charles S. Hatch Post #79 does incredible work helping veterans in need, and are always looking for ways to contribute to the Berwick community. The Berwick Farmer’s Market is run with a Manager and volunteers. The Select Board, Planning Board and Board of Appeals all have members who have dedicated many years to their community. The Berwick Public Library serves in many ways as the town’s community center. The Library hosts readings for children, educational sessions, movie night, senior social hour, genealogy club, knitting and crocheting, and basic tech help.

Like most communities in Maine, Berwick's median age has risen over the years. Maine is waking up to the reality of an impending demographic crisis, as the Baby Boomer generation enters into the 65+ population and not enough young people are moving to or staying in the State. Berwick has seen the median age rise from 35.6 in 2000 to 39 in 2010 and the population of 65+ community members rise from 606 in 2000 to 799 in 2010. Now is the perfect time to include age-friendly aspects throughout Berwick's Downtown. ADA crosswalks, wider sidewalks and bike lanes are a part of a vibrant downtown that is also friendly to all generations.

The goal of the project is to help the Berwick area and its town leaders better understand the needs of older residents and support healthy aging of all residents.

The Project Team

Without these folks, this plan would not exist! The following people have contributed in the work of developing the assessment and action plan:

Amy Flowers, Survey Consultant, Analytic Insight

Kathy Connor, Southern Maine Planning

Peter Morelli, AARP

Andrea Cooper, AARP

Patricia Oh, AARP

Ruth Bleau, Committee Member

James Bellissimo, Committee member

Pat Boisvert, Committee Member

Laurice Jackson, Committee Member

Sharon Kelly, Committee Member

Lisa Huestis, Survey Contributor

Paul Boisvert, Survey Contributor

A special thanks to AARP for the continued support. Thank you to Peter Morelli for kicking off the project, to Andrea for keeping our committee afloat and to Patricia for being our current contact who is so helpful. Thank you!

Description of how the age-friendly assessment was conducted.

Peter Morelli of AARP attended an Envision Berwick meeting in the Fall 2015 to explain the Age-Friendly network, there was an opportunity for a grant for towns to assess their community and write an action plan to address challenges and opportunities. Envision Berwick wrote a grant and The Town of Berwick was awarded \$8,000. A survey was the first part of the assessment and was developed by combining two Age-Friendly community surveys from Brunswick and Falmouth. James Bellissimo, Pat Boisvert and Paul Boisvert went over each question to create a revised version of the survey, James and Lisa Huestis went over the survey again, adding pieces where needed and removing some in other areas. The survey was tested a few times by community members in Berwick and feedback was incorporated into a semi-final draft. From this point, Amy Flowers of Analytic Insight worked her magic to format, simplify and improve the survey. After a few back-and-forths between Amy and the committee, we had our final draft.

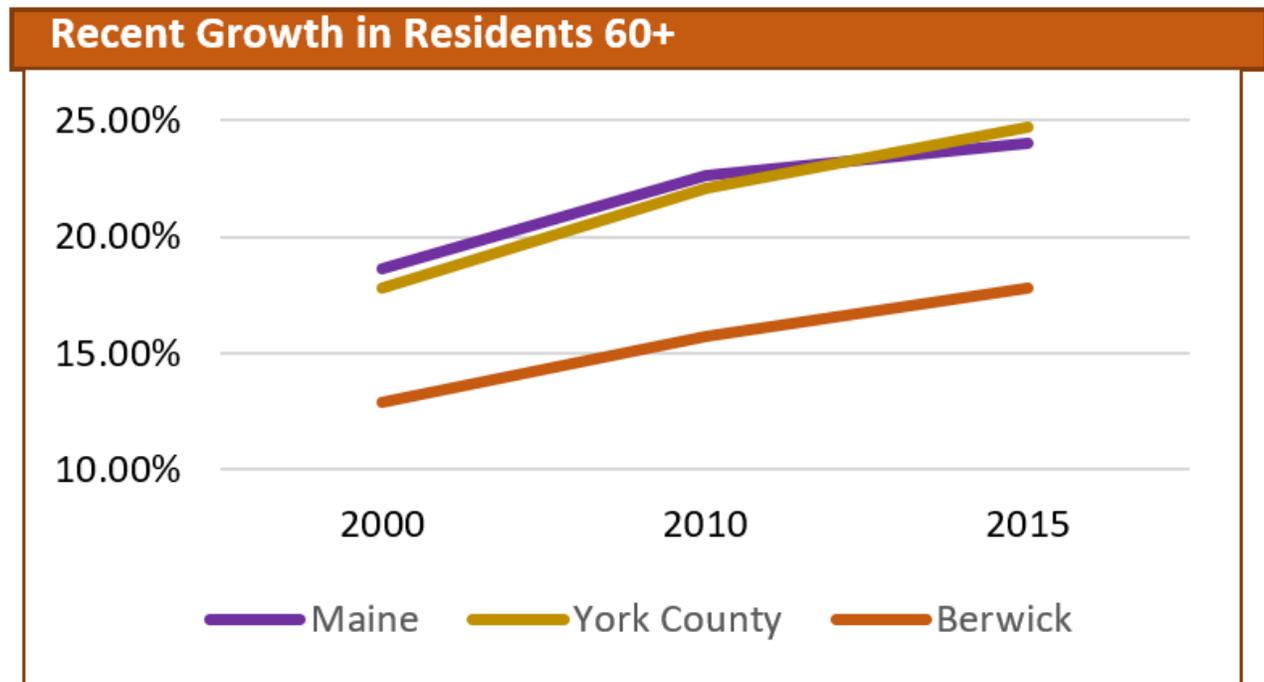
One thousand surveys were mailed to residents selected at random from a voter list of Berwick residents. The survey in addition was available on the internet through Facebook and the Envision Berwick e-mail list. Paper surveys were available at the Town Hall and local areas. The total number of surveys received was 276, including 181 paper responses and 95 online responses.

The survey highlighted important themes, however, the committee felt it needed more in-depth information to develop an action plan. We decided to host an Age-Friendly Forum with the public. The committee modeled the event after a Recreation Master Plan Summit a couple months earlier, with a twist. We invited leaders from the community – Police, Church, Library etc. and they acted as our panel. The forum focused on Housing, Transportation and Communication, topics that stood out are top issues from the survey assessment.

The Demographics of Aging in Berwick

Data, charts and summaries provided by Patricia Oh of AARP

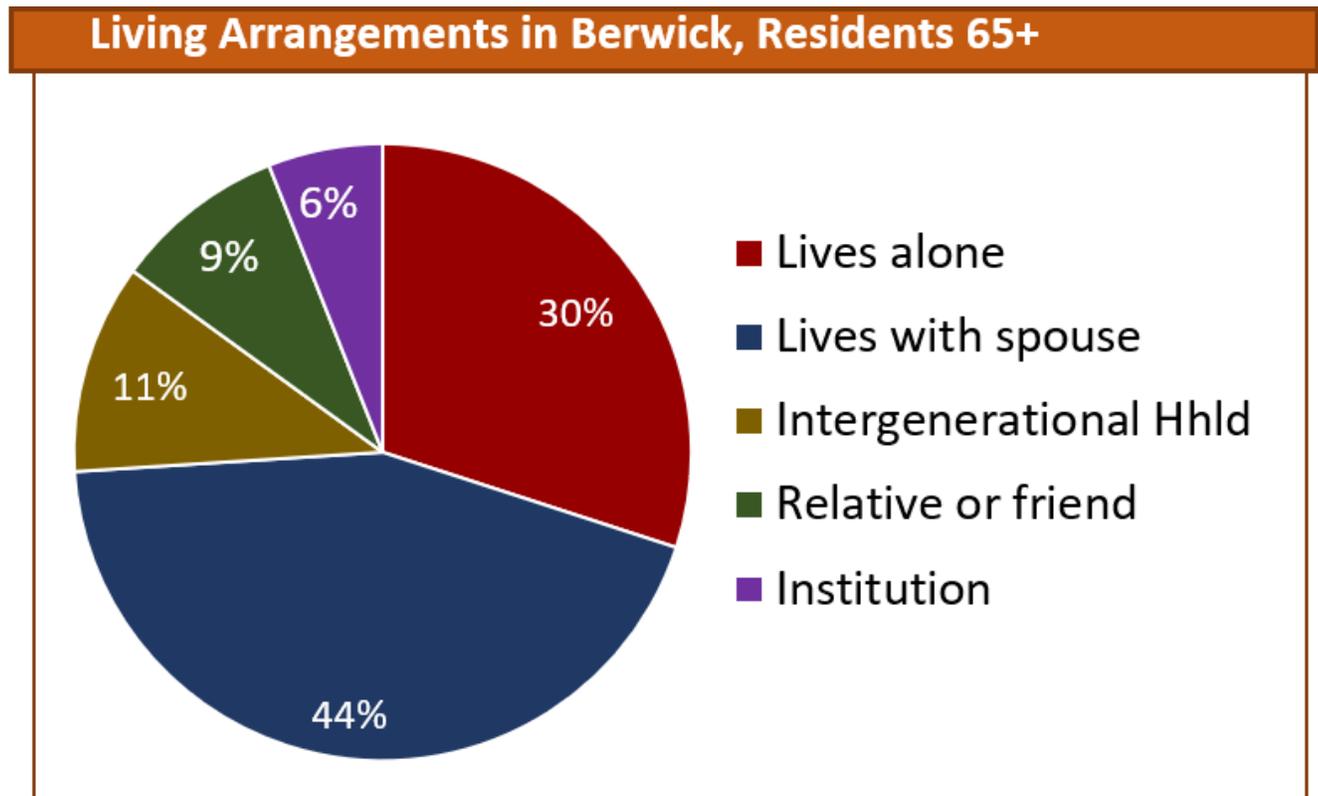
Berwick is home to 7,456 people, with a median age of 39, 5 years younger than the median age of Maine. Although the percentage of the population 60+ in Berwick is less than in surrounding York County or in Maine, the 60+ population has grown steadily, reflecting state-wide trends.



The area has many age-friendly features that make it a great place to live for residents of all ages. The AARP Livability Index score for the region is 56/100. Strengths of the area include opportunities for civic, social and cultural involvement, safe streets with fewer fatal crashes than the national average, access to quality health care, and economic opportunity. The primary weaknesses are affordability of housing, the lack of exercise opportunities, and the need to use cars to get to the places people need to go.

Living Arrangements

34% of the 2,775 households in Berwick include at least one person 60+. While most older people (70%) live with a spouse or another person, about one-third live alone. Most (71%) people living alone are women. Residents of Berwick want to age where they have lived a lifetime; 72% of older homeowners and 28% of their peers in rental housing have lived in their homes more than 25 years. Long-term residents are highly attached to the community and have social ties that sustain them in older years but may need help to age safely in their own home if they develop a disability or no longer drive.

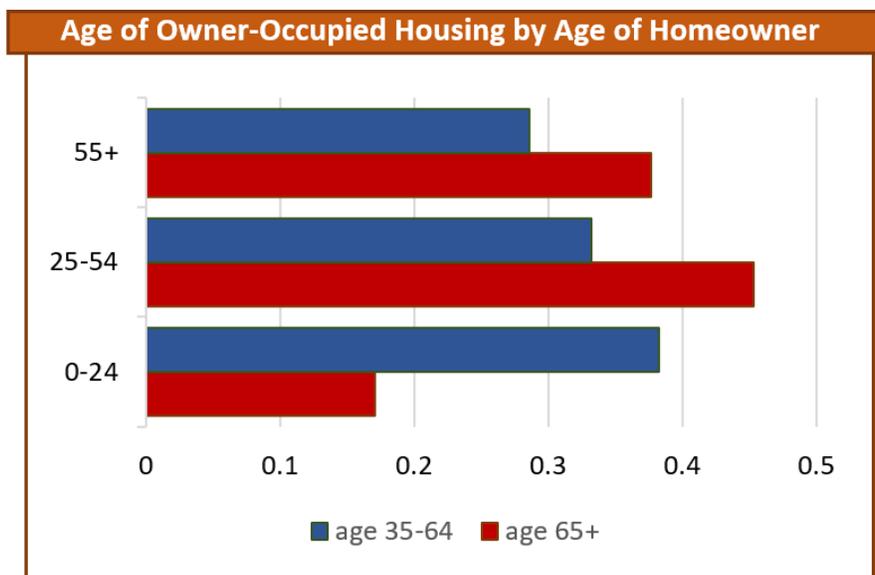


An assisted living facility is an example of an institution.

Home ownership is common; 81% of older families in Berwick live in a home they own or are purchasing. Affordable housing is defined as housing which cost 30% or less of income. About one in three (32%) have a loan on their home, compared with 38% of their peers in York County. 25% of older homeowners with a mortgage spend 30% or more of their monthly income on housing, compared with 4% of people without a home loan and 76% of renters (predominantly unaffordable housing). Median monthly housing-related expenses of an older couple with a mortgage are \$1,429 (loan, insurance, and property taxes), compared to \$560 for people without a loan and \$779 for older renters.

Age of Housing where Older People Live

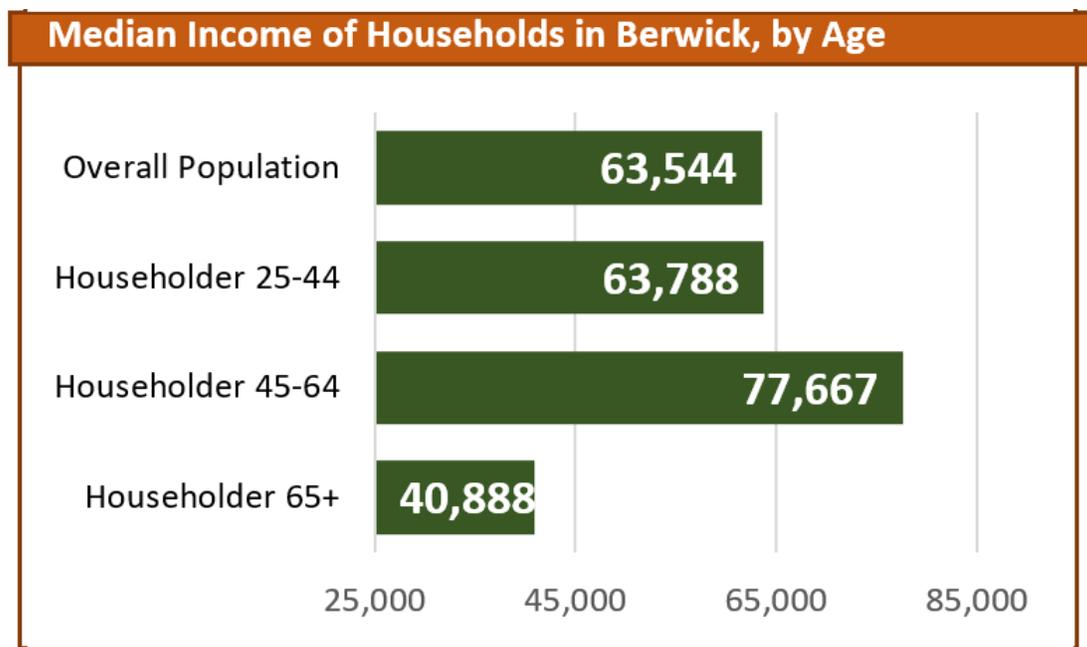
Eighty-three percent of older homeowners live in housing 25+ years old. Older homes need more maintenance and modifications for people to age in place. The need to find help with home chores is greatest for the oldest homeowners and those aging with a disability that prevents them from doing simple, routine chores safely.



Older homes need modifications for our seniors to age in place.

Income Security

Older households have a lower median income than the overall population. There is significant income disparity among householders 65+ in Berwick; 16% have a yearly income less than \$20,000 while 28% receive \$75,000+ annually. The Elder Economic Index estimates that older people in Berwick in good health need about \$31,160/year to meet basic needs without getting assistance. Forty-six percent of older families in Berwick have a yearly income less than economic security.



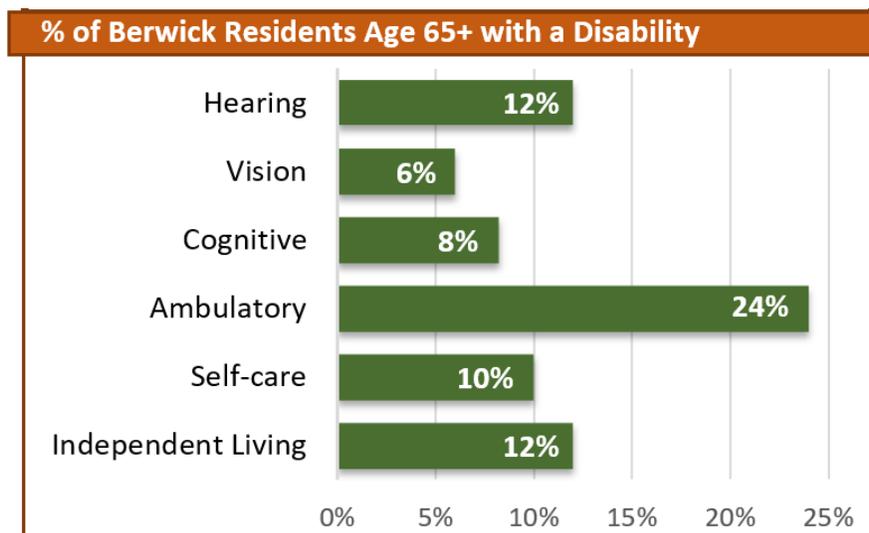
Mean Social Security income is \$17,421 and mean retirement (pension, annuities, etc.) income is \$34,438 for older families in the Berwick. A household can have more than one source of income; people depending on Social Security alone are more likely to experience poverty than households that depend on other forms of retirement income or a mix of Social Security and other income.

Twelve percent of 60+ households received Food Stamps in the past year, compared with 24% of younger families in Berwick.

Veterans

Overall, about 10% of residents in Berwick are veterans but the number jumps to 46% of men age 65+. Veteran status is a protection against poverty; just 6% of veterans compared with 11% of non-veterans age 65+ had income less than 100% of the poverty rate (\$11,700 for a family of one; \$15,930 for a couple). The rate of disability is slightly higher for non-veterans than for veterans; 29% of veterans have a disability, compared with 35% of non-veterans.

Disability

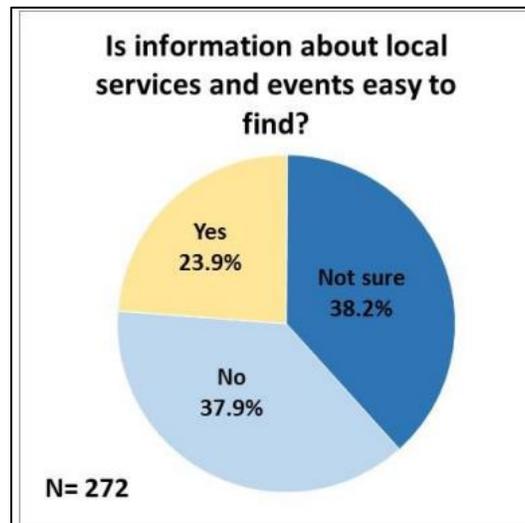


Older residents of Berwick have a disability rate similar to their peers throughout Maine; 34% of people 65+ have at least one disability, compared with 35% of older Mainers. The disability rate increases to 43% for people age 75 and older. More than half (53%) of older residents with a disabling condition live with more than one disability. People who live with multiple physical limitations face an increased risk of social isolation.

Data, charts and summaries provided by Patricia Oh of AARP

What we learned from the people of Berwick

1. Information isn't easy to find in Berwick.



Just 23.9% out of the 272 question respondents said information about local services and events is easy to find.

2. Community members are deeply concerned about property taxes.

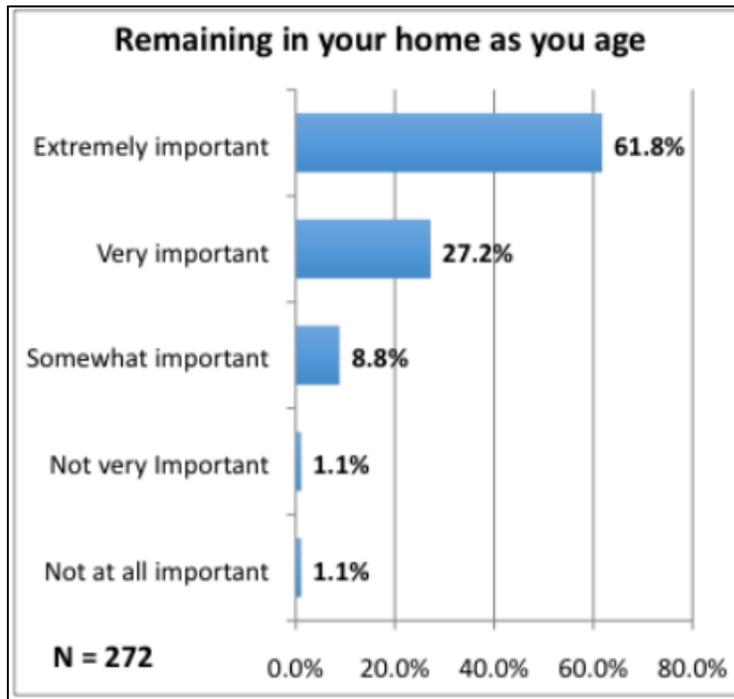
“Taxes will drive us all out of town.”

82.7% of survey responders said expense of maintaining their current home would be the reason why they moved during their retirement.

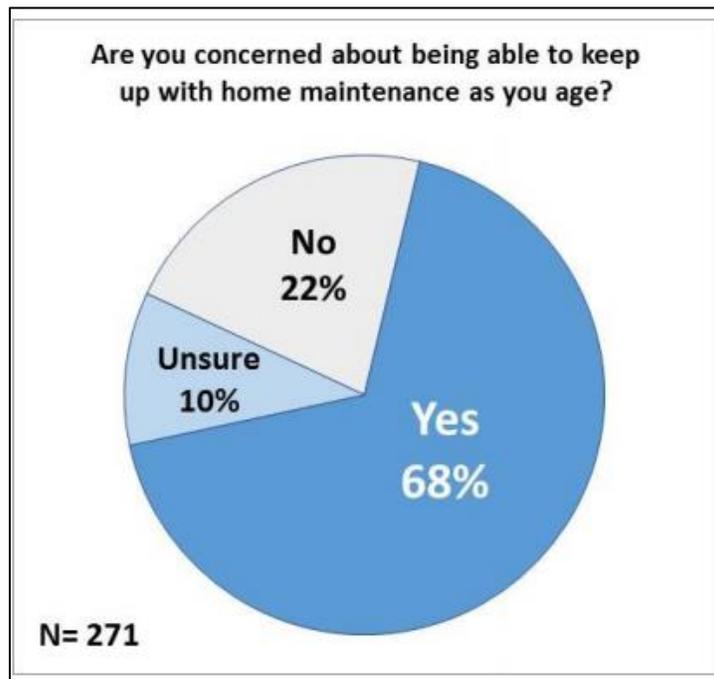
3. Opportunities for walkability are missed.

“Fix Sullivan St sidewalks, people are walking in the street, not safe! For me, it is over a mile without sidewalks to get to the closest bus stop.”

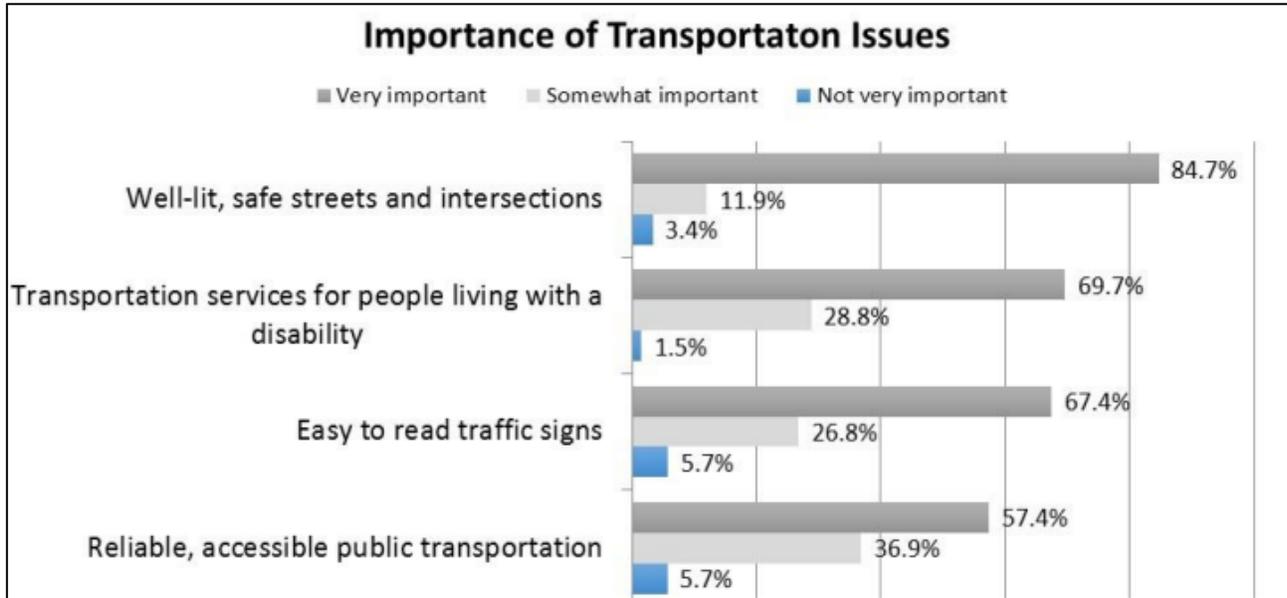
4. People want to stay in their home as they age.



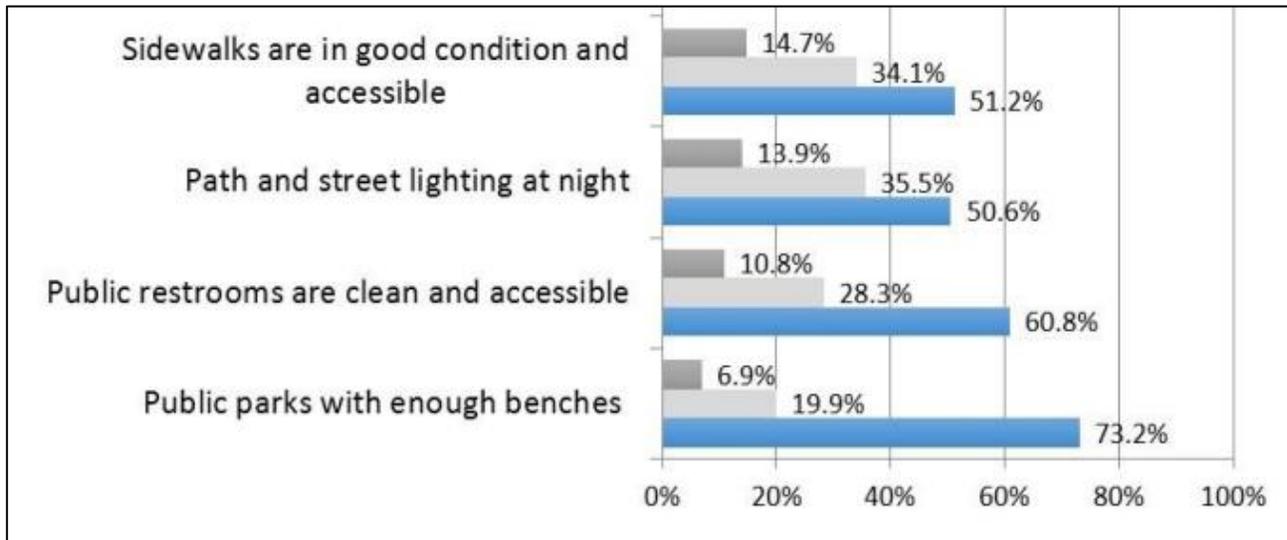
5. Our seniors are concerned about keeping up with home maintenance.



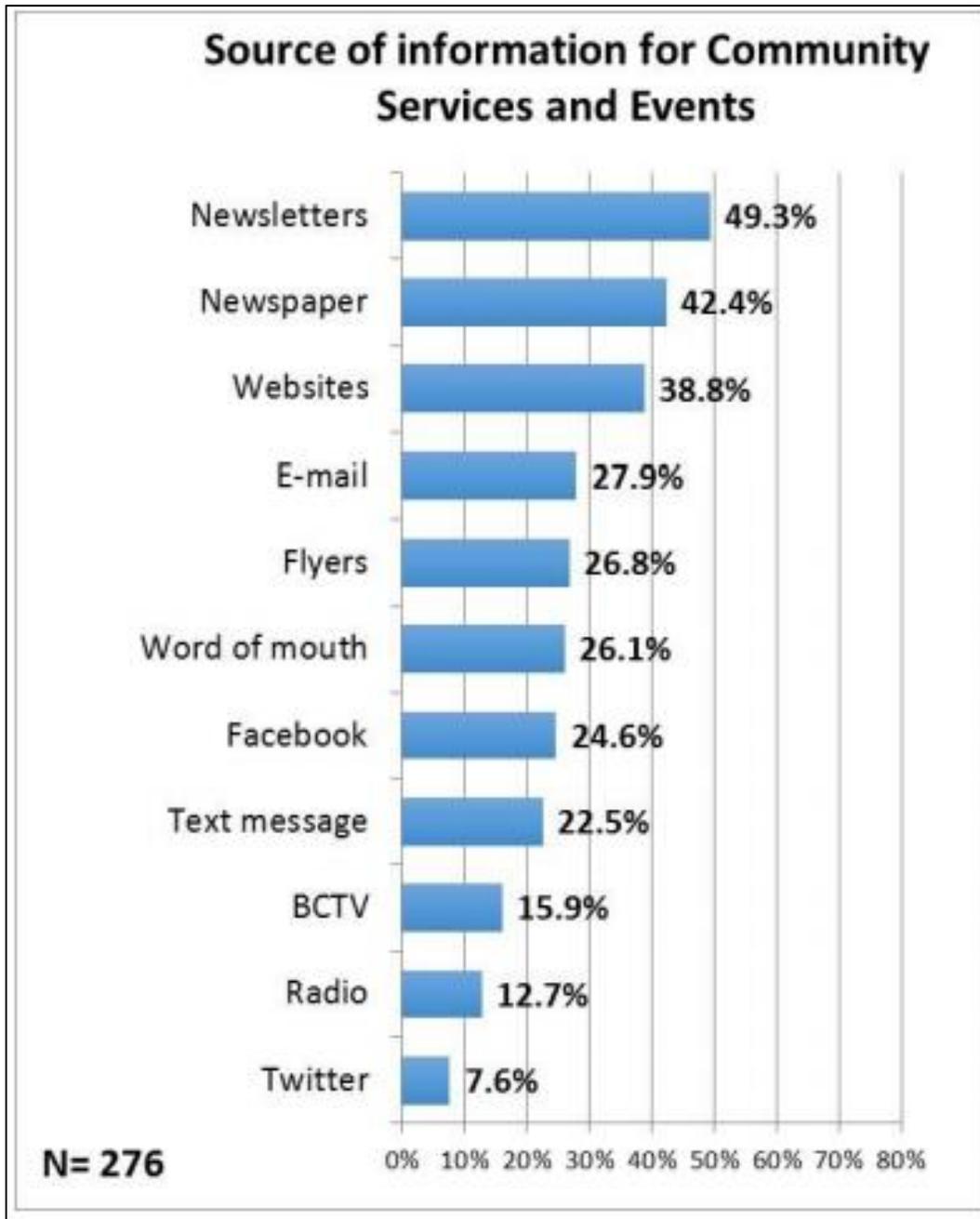
6. Well-lit, safe streets and intersections is the most important transportation issue.



7. Our community lacks amenities for our seniors to age in place such as sidewalks in good condition that are accessible, street lighting for night time, public restrooms, and parks with benches.



8. Non-digital sources are preferred methods of receiving communications.



Goals, oversight and management of implementation of the Action Plan

The biggest advocates and stewards of this Action Plan will be the Berwick for a Lifetime committee. For sustainability and to alleviate the pressure of a small committee, the Action Plan will be adopted as an appendix to the Town's Comprehensive Plan. At that point it would also come under the purview of Berwick's Comprehensive Plan implementation committee, Envision Berwick. There will be overlap with other town groups and committees, and there will likely be ad-hoc committees which will take ownership of a policy and or goal in the form of a project.

Transportation		
Policy	Action(s)	Responsibility & Timeline
Improve existing bus stops	Add benches, shelters and create a drop off zone at each bus stop where needed. Explore opportunities to increase safety and comfort.	EB, COAST 1-3 Years, Ongoing
Make grocery shopping easier for our seniors.	Work with and make known existing programs to assist several Berwick seniors who require assistance with picking up groceries, transporting them back home and stocking in their house.	EB, BFAL 1-3 Years, Ongoing
Prevent falls and promote car safety in our seniors' driveways in the Winter.	Volunteers pick up sand and salt and deliver, spread sand and salt. Make picking up sand easier. Look to Lowe's and Home Depot for deposited buckets. Look to the other communities a model/inspiration.	BFAL, Public Works 1-3 Years, Ongoing
Promote walking and increase comfort in the Village Center. Increase recreation opportunities seniors.	Establish a bench program for the downtown, outlining where benches should go and prioritizing the phasing of the project. Also look to corporate sponsorships for benches.	EB, BFAL, BOS 1-3 Years, Ongoing
	Support and make known walking program in the area.	
	Advocate for age-friendly sidewalks, crosswalks, intersections, lighting throughout the Downtown.	
Help our seniors get to where they need to go comfortably and safely.	Support and make known COAST volunteer driving programs & Senior Companion program. & hospital driving program. Support YCCA.	BFAL, COAST, YCCA Ongoing
Best practices	Develop and maintain volunteer network & pursue grant opportunities	EB, BFAL Ongoing

Housing		
Policy	Action	Responsibility & Timeline
Advocate for Senior Housing in Berwick and Downtown Berwick.	Report at PB, BOS meetings. Meeting with Town officials to discuss the need for senior housing.	BFAL. EB Ongoing
Improve affordability to allow Seniors to remain in their home and alleviate some financial stresses and tax burdens.	Establish volunteer tax program at Town Hall ala Saco for property tax credit. For those age TBD+. Lived in Berwick for TBD years. Up to TBD rebate for TBD hours worked.	BOS, Town Staff, BOS 1 Year, Ongoing
	Pursue tax rebate program ala Cumberland. For those age TBD+. Lived in Berwick for TBD years, up to TBD off property taxes.	
	Educate seniors about existing tax exemptions so all benefits available are taken advantage of.	
Showcase new tips and tricks for senior homeowners to improve daily living.	Rent Bethel's tool table, look into creating a Berwick tool table. To have on display at Farmer's Market, Town Voting, Library and Town Hall. Tool table is setup with gadgets for seniors to remain independent i.e. a device that helps to open jars.	BFAL 1-2 Years
Help Seniors stay in their home.	Establish drop in to say hello program. Support Senior Companion Program. Also support call-in program.	BFAL, BOS 1-5 Years, Ongoing
	Look into skill swapping/bartering opportunities.	
	Develop handyman program - a trusted list of contractors who can change lightbulbs, fix door handles etc.	
	Support Methodist Church window program	
	Connect w/ Thriving in Place York County and bring it to Berwick.	
Best practices	Develop and maintain volunteer network & pursue grant opportunities	EB, BFAL Ongoing

Communication		
Policy	Action	Responsibility & Timeline
Make information, events and announcements easy to find.	Advocate for an electronic sign that fits with the rural character of Berwick.	BFAL 1-3 Years, Ongoing
	Make more use of sign boards around Town. I.e. transfer station. Look into possibility of sign boards changed through the Town Hall volunteer program.	
	Determine feasibility of a call loop program. A line where people can call in to see the week's upcoming events.	
	Develop a campaign which promotes communication channels and comprehensive documents which already exists in Berwick.	
Educate community members how to use tech. to increase communication with town and family members.	Create how-to videos how to use berwickmaine.org, Facebook, Skype, Gmail etc.	Berwick Public Library 1 Year, Ongoing
	Develop regular program of experts, community members, High School students teaching technology tips at library.	
Provide comprehensive websites, documents for easy access to vetted information.	Develop Resource Guide. AARP prints first 100 copies Keep resource guide updated online quarterly.	AARP, BFAL 1-3 Year, Ongoing
	Create Facebook page and/or website page for Berwick for a Lifetime.	
	Support non-digital sources of information i.e. newsletters, flyers.	
Best practices	Develop and maintain volunteer network & pursue grant opportunities	EB, BFAL Ongoing